

June/July 2003 PlatoonLeader Update
platoonleader.army.mil

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Commentary: The Long Night Continues

The PlatoonLeader team was struck by the recent comments of a young 3rd ACR Sergeant currently deployed west of Baghdad conducting Checkpoint operations. He was being interviewed by a reporter about the actions his crew took the previous day in destroying a hostile group of Iraqis who had attacked his men. When asked whether he slept okay – he flatly stated: ‘no’ - the face of an Iraqi he had killed had been etched in his brain. The young sergeant looked confident, but tired. As the interview continued, the sound of gunfire echoed in the distance. The sergeant stopped what he was saying, cocked his head in the direction of the gunfire, and stated matter-of-factly: “You hear that? That mean’s it’s going to be another long night.”

Although we have officially declared an end to major combat operations in support of OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM, the long night continues. Our soldiers are conducting operations that span the very thin line between peace-keeping and peace-making. That thin line exists within the mind of soldiers such as the young sergeant above, who are making hair-trigger judgment calls that impact the lives of the soldiers they are charged to keep and the national security policies of our nation.

Marine Corps General (ret) Krulak has a name for the type of soldier we see above: the Strategic Corporal – whose actions can and do impact the policies of a nation. Within a mythical ‘three-block radius’ this Strategic Corporal (or Sergeant, or LIEUTENANT) must develop the conceptual ability to transition along the continuum of operations. One block everything seems fine, your unit is bivouacked conducting maintenance and recovery operations. The next block, one of your squads is assisting in humanitarian operations. The last block someone is trying to kill you. Right now, our soldiers exist in that same environment - confronted by the entire spectrum of tactical challenges in the span of a few hours.

So how do we, as officers, prepare both ourselves, and young soldiers such as the sergeant mentioned above, to make the right call in such a volatile environment? GEN Krulak advocates a three pronged approach: (1) building a character foundation based on values, (2) a continued dedication to lifelong learning, and (3) the existence of strong leadership.

PlatoonLeader is dedicated to building the Strategic Lieutenant. Grounded in the values needed to make the right call within the non-contiguous environment that is facing our soldiers today; dedicated to creating a conversation that emphasizes how to do our jobs better; and by emphasizing leadership as a decisive variable, committed to creating better combat ready teams.

This month we present to you stories and AAR’s from the front. Pete Kilner, one of the original founders of CompanyCommand.com and Platoonleader.org, is currently on the ground in Iraq debriefing junior leaders on their experiences and lessons learned. Barry Clarke, stationed in Korea, explores the ‘ramification of the awesome responsibility’ of leading soldiers in an interesting, original essay. And finally, Chris Kolenda, a regular contributor to the site, explores in Part 1 of a 3 part essay, the concept of responsibility as it applies to our job as officers.

The long night continues for our soldiers and our leaders. Values, Training, and Leadership can provide the ethical and moral high-ground needed to complete the mission!

Fight Fiercely!!

This Month’s Update:

1. Notes/AAR's/Articles from the Battlefront
 2. A View on Officership
 3. Current Discussions on the Site
 4. Responsibility: A Hallmark of Professionalism, Part I
 5. Cool Tools
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1. Notes/AAR's/Articles from the Battlefront

The team has been sent or collected a variety of Battle Summaries and Articles surrounding actions of combat leaders during OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM. We also have had the distinct honor to have a representative (Pete Kilner) on the ground debriefing leaders about their actions. Check out some of these additions:

3-7 Cav AAR, Medical AAR from Afghanistan, OIF Marine Corps Armor AAR:
<http://platoonleader.army.mil/viewtopic.php?topic=574&forum=31&4>

3ID Battle Summary:
<http://platoonleader.army.mil/viewtopic.php?topic=894&forum=31&0>

OIF: Equipment Lessons Learned:
<http://platoonleader.army.mil/article.php?sid=79&mode=thread&order=0>

TF 1-30 INF Battle Summary:
<http://platoonleader.army.mil/article.php?sid=69&mode=thread&order=0>

The Leaders of OIF:
<http://platoonleader.army.mil/article.php?sid=80&mode=thread&order=0>
<http://platoonleader.army.mil/article.php?sid=73&mode=thread&order=0>
<http://platoonleader.army.mil/article.php?sid=71&mode=thread&order=0>

Pete Kilner's Collection:

Mason Landmine:
<http://platoonleader.army.mil/article.php?sid=78&mode=thread&order=0>

Platoon Before LD:
<http://platoonleader.army.mil/article.php?sid=77&mode=thread&order=0>

Attack on 2 BCT TOC
<http://platoonleader.army.mil/article.php?sid=76&mode=thread&order=0>

Engineers on OBJ Moe:
<http://platoonleader.army.mil/article.php?sid=75&mode=thread&order=0>

Team Gator and their attack on OBJ PEACH:
<http://platoonleader.army.mil/article.php?sid=74&mode=thread&order=0>

2. A View on Officership

1LT Barry Clark, a reservist recently called to active duty, and currently serving as an Executive Officer for B Company, 122 Signal Bn, in Korea, explores in a very cool and inspiring article, his thoughts on Officership. Barry has the experience to back up his insights with over 18 years of service. Some excerpts from his contribution:

“Being an officer can be, in my opinion, summarized into four main categories. One must be prepared to do what is right, no matter the cost. An officer must make a difference at his level of operation. He must develop skills and know our craft. Finally an officer must be a professional and take ownership of the greater organization and endeavor to make a difference in the bigger pond.

Being prepared to do what is right no matter the cost is an awesome endeavor but is the very bedrock of what being an officer is all about. Accepting a commission in the military of the United States means to accept an office of trust, responsibility and authority to defend the Constitution and execute the National Military Policy as expressed and directed by the President. These words we all understand but the deeper meaning is lost. Suffice it to say that within the specified tasks listed above there are numerous implied tasks. As an officer you occupy a special role with a special responsibility. You serve not only to execute orders from above but we also serve as a form of check and balance from top to bottom within the organization. Our ultimate duty is to do what is right, in the face of adversity from the enemy, from harsh conditions, from peer pressure, from our own human failings and from pressure from above.

Look for a moment at your oath of office that you recited upon getting commissioned. The order of precedence within that document is significant. You swore to defend the Constitution first, against foreign and domestic enemies. You then swore to obey the orders of the President. Then you swore to obey the orders of officers appointed over you. It is a significant thing that those items fell within that order. It is conceivable, and there are historical cases to look to, that you could one day find yourself faced with orders that conflicted with one or more of the items you swore to obey. At a time like that doing what is right becomes the most costly to you and the most important to the nation. It is then that your role as a check and balance to what is wrong moves to the fore.

We can all probably, or at least hopefully, complete a career without facing a life changing choice such as the scenario discussed above. Doing what is right would seem to be much easier than say the choices that Robert E. Lee, Thomas Jackson or George Washington had to make when fate thrust upon them enormous decisions of what is right and what does duty mean. Nothing could be further from the truth. We are faced daily with small decisions, choices that, depending upon what we decide, make the organization better or worse. As we grow in rank and responsibility these decisions will have greater impact. Making easy wrong decisions early makes it much simpler to make bigger wrong decisions later.”

Read the rest of 1LT Clarke’s contribution here:

<http://platoonleader.army.mil/files/officership.pdf>

3. Current Discussions on the Site

Your PL.org Team encourages you to check out the following three hot-discussion threads and pass along your perspectives. These are all found in the discussion forum.

“Leaders or Managers?”- what are we as Platoon Leaders? Is it a choice or is it a result of our actual situation? Does it matter, anyways?

<http://platoonleader.army.mil/viewtopic.php?topic=936&forum=3&9>

“To the Chief of Staff”- fellow LTs “send” messages to the Army Chief of Staff from everything from the beret to budgeting to priorities

<http://platoonleader.army.mil/viewtopic.php?topic=648&forum=3&28>

“First Impressions”- the field gives their impressions that our use of “grammar” leaves on our subordinates, peers, and superiors

<http://platoonleader.army.mil/viewtopic.php?topic=935&forum=3&18>

4. Responsibility: A Hallmark of Professionalism, Part I

MAJ Chris Kolenda has been a regular contributor to our site. This month, he takes a stab at the concept of responsibility as an officer. He writes: Joyful acceptance of responsibility is a hallmark of professionalism, particularly in the military.” Kolenda advocates a ‘Personal Passion for the Profession’ and examines characteristics of those who demonstrate this passion:

- a. Studying the profession constantly. Professionals master the doctrine and the tactics, techniques, and procedures of their craft and possess expert technical competence.
- b. The Buck Stops Here. Professionals lead from the front.
- c. Relentless adherence to standards. Professionals understand that discipline is the two-fold process of education and enforcement.
- d. Doing what is right (Looking inside the numbers). Having a passion for excellence also means getting results the right way.
- e. Seeking Improvement. Professionals take responsibility to improve themselves and their organizations.

Read the whole article here:

<http://platoonleader.army.mil/files//responsibility%20-%20kolenda.pdf>

5. Cool Tools:

Check out a few of the many tools contributed to the site by our members!

APFT Calculator:

<http://platoonleader.army.mil/download.php?op=viewdownload&details&lid=183&tttitle=APFT%20Calculator>

Indirect Fire Trigger Calculator:

http://platoonleader.army.mil/download.php?op=viewdownload&details&lid=110&tttitle=Indirect_Fire_Trigger_Calculations

Army Publication Finder:

<http://platoonleader.army.mil/download.php?op=viewdownload&details&lid=180&tttitle=Army%20Pub%20Finder>

Your “Tools” Are Needed!- please send your great ones in to share with others! A “Tool” is a file (usually Microsoft Office Word/Excel/PowerPoint/Access) that others can use to help them be better platoon leaders. Please send in your valuable ones and we will post them to the site to share with the profession! Notice that we have a new “Recent Tools” box on the homepage that shows the most recent entries. Send your tools as an email attachment to

tools@platoonleader.org. Our software currently doesn't allow automatic posting of tools by users- so we try to get them posted after we receive them ASAP!

The following link shows all the current tools on the site:

<http://platoonleader.army.mil/download.php?op=alltools&ratenum=1000&ratetype=num>

Join the PL.org Moderator/Leadership Team: Come up on the net (email: manager@platoonleader.org) if you would like to be a discussion forum moderator or would like to provide leadership in any specific way. We are all volunteers who run the site and your leadership makes a tremendous difference.

Leadership Matters!

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The PlatoonLeader Team

www.platoonleader.org; platoonleader.army.mil

We are always interested in your Feedback! Email us: manager@platoonleader.org